

## “MANIAC: 30th Anniversary Edition” (DVD/Blu-Ray Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
Monday, 25 October 2010 20:39

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The first time I saw MANIAC, I had absolutely no clue about the reverence it receives from horror and sleaze fans. I'd found the VHS for \$1 in a going-out-of-business video shop when I was 16, and was under the impression I'd stumbled upon a truly odd hidden gem. Years later, I now very much understand its context and the place it holds in exploitation lovers' hearts.

Having not seen it since that fateful afternoon, I am happy to report that while not so hidden, it's still very much an odd gem. And it's one whose new 30th Anniversary double-DVD and Blu-ray editions from Blue Underground fully exploit the advantages of the media, giving you a whole day's worth of material to sift through.



MANIAC is both the tale of Joe Spinell's Frank Zito, a lonely, disturbed man whose long-festering mother issues have surfaced and are expressed in murder, and a portrait of New York City at the time—one that is incredibly fascinating to any young New Yorker (like myself) who was never witness to it, and even more so as an employee of FANGORIA, whose offices nest just at the top of Times Square, now a much different place.

The first fright feature by director and Blue Underground head honcho William Lustig, MANIAC, while rough around the edges, plays very much like the passion project it was, and anyone watching it today should still be able to see the youthful hunger and heart poured in by Lustig and writer/star/enigma Spinell. The only slight disappointment with revisiting the film, for this writer at least, was that memories of MANIAC had hazed with time, and thus I was under the impression that its truly weird and surreal-like aspects were peppered throughout the film, not just confined to the last 20 minutes or so. That's not to put the movie down, however, as it's full of atmosphere, suspense and an overall sense of real-life skuzzy creepiness (highly accentuated by Spinell's overacting sweat glands).

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The new transfer is visually striking, especially on Blu-ray, consistently enhancing the film's grain and grime (except in the opening beach scene, which looks off—and Lustig explains why in a brand new commentary). The real winner in the new presentation is the sound, in 7.1 DTS-HD on the Blu-ray and 5.1 Dolby Digital on both discs, which makes the totally synthy score crisp and piercing and rad as hell. If you own the previous Blue Underground edition of MANIAC, which was already pretty packed to the hilt, the question aside from the remastering is if the new supplements included are worth the double dip. The answer is yes, in every way.

The returning special features, including the original lively commentary by Lustig, makeup FX artist Tom Savini, editor Lorenzo Marinelli and Spinell's right-hand man, Luke Walter; the extensive variations of theatrical trailers and radio and TV spots; and documentary THE JOE SPINELL STORY are all just as entertaining as ever, but it's the new additions that bring the 30th Anniversary Edition above and beyond. The new commentary by Lustig and producer Andrew W. Garroni never goes slack as they recall shooting woes, relate fun facts and reflect on the HD conversion, and is absolutely worth a listen. Four new featurettes offer on-camera chats with Savini, lead actress Caroline Munro and composer Jay Chattaway, and a lighthearted and awesome bit in which Lustig visits songwriters Michael Sembello and Dennis Matkosky to address the rumors that their hit pop song “Maniac” (used to great success in FLASHDANCE) was originally written for this film. It's a fun chat that ends with a great rendition of the song sporting some decidedly more violent lyrics.

Things get really in-depth, exhaustive, time-caspule-esque and standout on disc two. There's the aforementioned SPINELL STORY, the celebratory and heartbreaking look at the actor who seemed to have a profound effect on everyone surrounding him. Beyond that, though, are the two absolute best features the discs contain: “MANIAC Controversy” and “MANIAC Publicity.” The latter is a collection of radio interviews and TV appearances with the likes of Lustig, Spinell and Munro around the time of the film's release, discussing its content and story. The former is an incredibly large gallery of news stories from cities around the nation, covering the buzz and extremely negative response MANIAC garnered from critics and family/women's groups alike. It's a truly captivating look at how horror is so often misunderstood by much of the general public and elitist film community—especially when in at least two of the clips, Fox News-like editing trickery is used to make the case that the wave of slasher films released around the era of MANIAC were all misogynistic and offensive. Both use a scene from SILENT SCREAM (one of the few films of the time to feature a female murderer) to hammer home their point, yet conveniently cut away before the reveal of Barbara Steele as the knife-wielding killer approaching a tied-up Rebecca Balding.

Fans with a casual interest, hardcore devotees and collectors alike would all do dreadfully well

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to pick up the new edition of MANIAC. There isn't much more to it than that.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷👤

DISC RATING: 🍷🍷🍷

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